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Title	An unnoticed official: the Praepositus Saltus
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Publication date	1994-05-01
Original Citation	Woods, D., 1994. An unnoticed official: the Praepositus Saltus. The Classical Quarterly (New Series), 44(1), pp.245-251 doi:10.1017/S000983880001733X
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1017/S000983880001733X
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Download date	2026-11-06 05:05:56
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/60

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Classical Quarterly **44** (i) 245–251 (1994) *Printed in Great Britain*

AN UNNOTICED OFFICIAL: THE *PRAEPOSITUS SALTUS*

The *Passio Typasii* survives in only one manuscript and was published for the first time in 1890.[1] It purports to describe the trial and death of a Mauretanian martyr, a military veteran by the name of Typasius, during the Diocletianic persecution. However as recently demonstrated its literary borrowings, from the *Breviarium* of Eutropius and the *Vita Martini* of Sulpicius Severus, suggest that it is a mere fiction and that it should be dated after c. A.D. 396.[2] It is the purpose of this note to draw attention to its preservation of an otherwise unattested title, that of the *praepositus saltus*, and to expand upon the significance of this title for the interpretation of the work. This title only occurs fully in one passage, being elsewhere abbreviated to *praepositus*, and this passage is of some interest therefore.

(*Passio Typasii* 4.4–5.2)
Eodem tempore sanctus Typasius solus monasterio quod sibi construxerat habitabat. Tunc praepositus saltus atque decurio eum cum cingulo quod deposuerat vel cum scuto et lanceis de eadem cellula protraxerunt atque eum Claudio, qui tunc Caesariensis provinciae dux fuerat, tradiderunt. Quem eum Claudius comes vidisset, praeposito et decurioni dixit: Quare istum cum veste lugubri meis occulis ingessistis? Decurio respondit: Typasius iste in nostra vexillatione militabat, sed a domno nostro Maximiano Augusto in Sitifensi provincia honestam missionem meruerat, et depositis in domo sua armis in solitudinem aedificavit sibi domum in qua solus habitabat.

This title left the original editor of the text somewhat perplexed: 'Diximus supra, proprio nomine *praepositum* dictum fuisse eum qui vexillationi veteranorum praeesset. Sed quid sibi hoc loco vult adjecta vox *saltus*? A conjecturis abstineo: nimis enim timendum videtur ne ista vox, sicut aliae innumerae in codice nostro, turpiter a scriba corrupta sit.'[3] He has been followed in his initial conjecture by a more recent author who asserts that 'the title *praepositus* refers to the official in charge of a detachment of veterans, probably living together in settlement', and avoids any explanation of the qualifying *saltus*.[4] Thus this *praepositus* has been accepted into the standard prosopographical work for this period as a military official.[5]

There would seem to be two main reasons for this current military interpretation. Firstly, there is the very nature of the story itself. In the context, that of the recall to active service of a veteran, the military interpretation of *praepositus* is that which springs to mind first. This is all the more so in that the description of the events

[1] C. Smedt, 'Passiones Tres Martyrum Africanorum', *Analecta Bollandiana* 9 (1890), 107–34. In my references to this text I follow Smedt's chapter headings, but also refer to the sentences which his text does not number.

[2] D. Woods, 'A Historical Source of the Passio Typasii', *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993), 78–84, developing upon C. Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Hagiographer* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 144–8, and P. Monceaux, 'Etude critique sur le Passio Tipasii Veterani', *Revue Archéologique* 4 (1904), 267–74. See also J. Fontaine, 'Suplice Severe a-t-il travesti Saint Martin de Tours en martyr militaire?', *Analecta Bollandiana* 81 (1963), 31–58, pp. 43–8 and F. S. Barcellona, 'Sogni e visioni nella letteratura martirologica africana posteriore al III secolo', *Augustinianum* 29, 193–212, pp. 208–10. It is the date of composition of the *Vita Martini* which provides the *terminus post quem* of c. A.D. 396 for the *Passio Typasii*. It should be pointed out now also that the *Vita Martini* spread across North Africa, from Carthage to Egyptian Thebes, within a remarkably short period, within a year of its production even, Sulpicius Severus, *Dial.* I.3, 23.

[3] C. Smedt, art. cit., p. 119.

[4] J. Helgeland, 'Christians in the Roman Army, A.D. 173–337', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.23.1 (1979), 724–834, p. 787.

[5] *PLRE* I, p. 269, Doncius.

surrounding Typasius' initial resignation from the army had contained several references to an indisputably military *praepositus*, his commanding officer, whose full title, *praepositus cunei*, was used on one occasion.[6] The temptation is to assume that any further *praepositus* is a military official also.

Secondly, there seems to have been too much presumption upon the decurion's statement, 'Typasius ista in nostra vexillatione militabat'. The use of the plural *nostra*, which is reinforced by some of the language which follows, may imply that the *praepositus*, as well as the decurion, had used to serve as a soldier, or so the author would like us to believe. Yet it must be stressed that this implies nothing about his rank while serving, or his present employment. It is intended only as a simple statement of historical fact. However the combination of the unqualified use of the term *praepositus*, and the decurion's use of the plural, may tempt one to identify the early *praepositus cunei* with the *praepositus saltus* who appears later in the text.

This current military interpretation of the *praepositus saltus* results in a number of inconsistencies. If the *praepositus* is indeed a military officer, a *praepositus vexillationis veteranorum* in charge of a community of veterans, then the decurion ought to state not that Typasius used to serve in the past, but rather that he was a present member who was refusing to perform his obligations. The text seems to imply that Typasius' military links had been completely severed. Moreover to understand Typasius as living in a settlement of veterans is a flat contradiction of the assertion that he lived a monastic life in seclusion, a contradiction which has been recognised by one of the commentators who holds the current interpretation.[7] More credit is due, I think, to the intelligence of the author of the *Passio Typasii* who could not himself have failed to spot so gross a blunder. However it is possible to offer an alternative interpretation of *praepositus saltus* which takes the full title into account, and overcomes the aforementioned difficulties.[8]

The *res privata* was a department of the late Roman administration whose purpose it was 'to administer and collect the rents of all land and house property which belonged to the state, and to claim for the state and incorporate all property which lapsed to it'.[9] At the head of this department there existed the *comes rei privatae*, below whom there was a *rationalis rei privatae* in charge of each diocese. Below the *rationales* there were the *procuratores*, or to give them their full titles, the *procuratores saltuum*, where the *saltus* was a large estate or conglomeration of estates. One of our main sources for the administration of the late empire, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, provides a short list of the procurators of the Western empire from which it would seem that, for the main, each procurator controlled one province.[10] It is of immediate interest to us, for example, that Mauretania Sitifensis had its own procurator.[11] Finally, there were the local agents of the *res privata*, the *actores rei privatae*, who were responsible for the enforcement of law on imperial lands.

It is not unreasonable, I think, to suggest that our *praepositus saltus* was an agent of the *res privata*, and that a place must be found for him in the administrative

[6] *Passio Typasii* 2.9: *Et continuo eum praepositus cunei eius accepit atque in ferrea vincula conjecit.*

[7] J. Helgeland, art. cit., p. 787.

[8] The pro-Roman nature of the text rules out the possibility that this *praepositus* and the decurion are 'cases, perhaps, not of actual Roman officials, but of local dynasts who had assumed Roman military titles', as described by J. Matthews, 'Mauretania in Ammianus and the Notitia', 157–88, p. 172, in *Aspects of the Notitia Dignitatum* (Oxford, 1976), edd. R. Goodburn and P. Bartholomew.

[9] A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 412–14, for this and what follows.

[10] *Not. Dig.* Oc. XII. 17–27.

[11] *Not. Dig.* Oc. XII. 25: *Procurator rei privatae per Mauritaniam Sitifensem.*

hierarchy already outlined. It is a noticeable feature of the list of procurators provided by the *Notitia Dignitatum* for the Western empire that many provinces are left unmentioned. However the department must have owned land in every province. It has been suggested that 'the *Notitia* probably only lists those of superior rank, *perfectissimi* perhaps'.[12] The province with which we are here concerned, Mauretania Caesariensis, is one of those absent from the *Notitia*'s list. Who was in charge of the imperial estates there? It is tempting to identify our *praepositus saltus* as this official whose rank did not quite merit him a mention in the *Notitia*. This is all the more the case in that the terms *praepositus* and *procurator* seem to have been used interchangeably. Attention has recently been drawn, for example, to the use by Ammianus Marcellinus of the term *praepositus* on two occasions where one might normally have expected to find the term *procurator*.[13] His use of the titles *praepositus monetae* and *praepositus Tyrii textrini* is directly comparable to the use of the title *praepositus saltus* here.[14] It was not necessarily a mistake on the part of Ammianus, therefore, that he used the terms that he did, but his language merely reflected a larger phenomenon.

The identification of the *praepositus saltus* as a member of the civilian administration of the *res privata*, whatever his actual level, has implications for our wider understanding of the *Passio Typasii*. Consider the decurion who accompanied the *praepositus* at the arrest of Typasius. Again he has traditionally been identified as a military official, 'the commander of a detachment (turma) of cavalry troops'.[15] However there is no secondary evidence to support such an interpretation. He is not depicted in the command of any armed men, for example, least of all cavalry. Again too much has been presumed on the basis of the simple historical statement by the decurion that Typasius used to serve in his unit. The alternative suggestion has been ignored, that the decurion was simply a member of that great civilian class of land-owners, the *decuriones curiales*. These were often referred to simply as *decuriones*, and one has to rely on the context to distinguish whether by this is meant the holder of a civilian or military office. In this context it is the civilian interpretation which makes most sense.

Let us consider firstly his association with an agent of the *res privata*. A *decurio curialis* could find himself in the position of a tenant of the *res privata*, willingly or otherwise. Until A.D. 342, for example, the leasing of state lands had secured to decurions the valuable right of immunity from curial charges.[16] Again, in A.D. 383 it was ordered that if willing tenants could not be found for temple and civic lands they should be compulsorily allocated to the decurions among others.[17] It would not have been entirely unusual, therefore, for a decurion to find himself a tenant of the *res privata*. In this case, I argue, the administrator of the lease, the *praepositus saltus*, was merely visiting his tenant, the *decurio*. But what was the purpose of the visit? Why should they have attempted to force Typasius into the army, or rather what would have inspired the author of the *Passio Typasii* in his depiction of two men in their positions behaving in that manner?

The answer to this lies in the recruitment methods of the Roman army. The recruitment of conscripts was a form of land-tax.[18] Smaller landholders were grouped

[12] A. H. M. Jones, op. cit., p. 413.
[13] M. Peachin, 'Praepositus or Procurator?', *Historia* 36 (1987), 248–9.
[14] Amm. 22.11.9; 14.9.7.
[15] J. Helgeland, art. cit., p. 787, simply following C. Smedt, art. cit., p. 119.
[16] *C.Th.* 12.1.33.
[17] *C.Th.* 10.3.4.
[18] A. H. M. Jones, op. cit., pp. 615–19, for what follows.

together for the purposes of providing their recruit, but greater landholders might possibly be assessed at a high enough figure to have to provide one or more recruits themselves. It was specifically laid down by the emperor Valens that the recruit was to be drawn from the registered tenants of the landlord responsible.[19] The lands of the *res privata* were normally, but not necessarily always, exempted from the need to provide recruits.[20] Indeed it is particularly interesting that a law dated 17 June 397 specifically requires that imperial estates throughout the provinces should furnish recruits. This coincides with the evidence of its literary borrowings which show that the *Passio Typasii* dates after c. A.D. 396, to which matter I shall return shortly.

In the light of this knowledge it is possible to explain our author's inspiration in his description of the arrest and trial of Typasius. He has merely described the functioning of the conscription system as he experienced it in his day with the addition of dialogue which he imagined suitable to the occasion of the conscription of a veteran and martyr during the Diocletianic persecution. More specifically he has described the operation of the recruitment system on lands of the *res privata* in the province of Mauretania Caesariensis. The *praepositus saltus* visited those of his tenants liable to furnish recruits, and in this case the decurion was liable to provide one. He chose Typasius, one of his subtenants. Together they delivered him to the *dux* Claudius as he toured the province.

It is appropriate at this point to note that the military interpretation of the *praepositus saltus* and the *decurio* was probably encouraged by their deliverance of Typasius to the military commander of the province, the *dux* Claudius. However it is important to realise that the office of *dux Mauretaniae Caesariensis* was almost unique in that it combined the highest military and civilian powers in the province.[21] It is not at all clear in what capacity Claudius hears, or is depicted as hearing, the case of Typasius. In so far as the administration of the recruitment system was normally the concern of the civilian authorities it is probable that he was acting, strictly speaking, in his capacity as civilian governor.

Although the story of Typasius' conscription is fictitious, it does ring true to what we know to have been the social conditions and attitudes prevailing in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Landholders did all they could to avoid the provision of recruits. Naturally they did not want to lose their best and most productive workers, and those they provided were often most unsuited to the career which lay before them.[22] What more likely, then, that some large landholder, faced with the demand to furnish a recruit, should pick upon that one of his tenants who had all but abandoned his land and was acting most strangely, having declared himself a monk? Here was a chance to get rid of this trouble-maker! The pagan emperor Julian had forcibly conscripted monks, but so also had the Christian Valens.[23] The profession of a monastic vocation was no protection from conscription. One suggests that the author has drawn on some firsthand knowledge of exactly such an occasion, or occasions, when landholders provided monks as their recruits and the authorities had no hesitation in accepting them.

The social realism of this text allows us to overcome also one of the more immediate objections that might possibly be raised to the current interpretation of the *praepositus saltus* and his decurion friend as civilian officials. Strictly speaking, it was illegal for any member of the *ordo decurionum* to evade his onerous curial duties by

[19] *C.Th.* 7.13.7 (A.D. 375).
[20] *C.Th.* 7.13.2 (A.D. 370); an exception being *C.Th.* 7.13.12 (A.D. 397).
[21] A. H. M. Jones, op. cit., p. 1252. [22] Ibid., p. 617.
[23] *Historia Monachorum In Aegypto* VIII.10; Orosius, *Hist. Adv. Paganos* VII.33.

joining the army. It should not have been possible for our decurion to declare that Typasius used to serve in his *vexillatio* for the very reason that he should not himself have served in the army. However the frequent repetition of laws forbidding military service to *decuriones curiales* shows that in reality many were escaping to military service.[24] It is a point worth bringing out also that our decurion seems to have fallen foul of one of the laws and systems of checks which sought to return such men to their curial duties, even if they had managed to evade them by several years of military service.

There are several other questions which immediately spring to mind about the society which produced this work. Why, if Typasius had received his *honesta missio*, was he being shown to be called up again? This was not the practice in the late Roman army. However this is surely at the very heart of Typasius' argument that he should not have to serve again, that he had received his *honesta missio* and it was not the practice for veterans to be recalled to service. The injustice of the emperor Maximianus and his officials in recalling veterans to service is the sort of ruthless and dishonest behaviour one would expect from these evil persecutors of Christianity. This, at least, is the way in which the author of this text seems to have thought.

In other aspects certainly the author of the *Passio Typasii* has made interesting revelations about the society in which he lived. Particularly revealing is his continuation of that part of the *Breviarium* of Eutropius which he used to introduce his story. Those *duces* who were sent to Mauretania to defend it from tribal attacks either feigned illness or pretended that they were afraid of shipwreck and resided on islands neighbouring Italy. There is revealed here a despair of official incompetence or corruption which is not unsuited to a society which had witnessed, for example, the behaviour of Romanus the *Comes Africae* c. A.D. 364–73.[25] However despite his implied criticism of imperial officials the author shows himself to be a loyal subject of Rome to whom he turns for help against native rebels. This loyalty suggests that, in the context of the religious struggles of the late antique period in Africa, he is more likely to have been of the Catholic rather than of the Donatist camp. This suspicion is reinforced by the only geographical indicators present in the text. The heading alleges, '*passus est Ticabis*', which has been interpreted as a reference to the town of Tigava. Typasius' name is clearly derivative of the Mauretanian coastal town of Tipasa. These two towns were Catholic strongholds, and their commemoration here suggests that our author was Catholic.[26] Our author's pro-Roman stance certainly reflects, for example, the fierce resistance which Tipasa showed the Moorish rebel Firmus in c. A.D. 373, aided it is alleged by their local martyr St. Salsa. Indeed this milieu best explains the fictitious nature of the *Passio Typasii*, as well as explaining its political outlook. A people who could create a martyr, Salsa, from a misreading of an old pagan tombstone were doubtlessly capable of other errors and fictions also.[27]

It is appropriate at this point also to comment in more detail on the date of the production of the *Passio Typasii*. Such anonymous hagiographical texts are notoriously difficult to date correctly, even to the right century sometimes. However there would seem to be sufficient evidence in this case to prefer one short period in

[24] *C.Th.* 12.1.11 (A.D. 325), 13 (A.D. 326), 22 (A.D. 336), 37 (A.D. 344), 38 (A.D. 346), 45 (A.D 358), 56 (A.D. 362), 87 (A.D. 381), 88 (A.D. 382), 95 (A.D. 383), 113 (A.D 386), 137 (A.D. 393), 147 (A.D. 416).

[25] B. H. Warmington, 'The Career of Romanus, Comes Africae', *Byzantische Zeitschrift* 49 (1956), 55–64.

[26] W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 51, 61, 199.

[27] H. Gregoire, 'Sainte Salsa, roman épigraphique', *Byzantion* 12 (1937), 212–34.

particular. The collection of recruits from imperial estates seems to have been a rare, emergency measure, of temporary duration only, to judge from the wording of the edict which commanded such in A.D. 397. One would not have expected that edict to have had any significance beyond that particular tax year. Given at Milan on 17 June, this edict may well have reached Africa by the following month. The revolt of Gildo, the Moorish *Comes Africae*, which swept across the whole of Roman North Africa, did not commence until the Autumn of A.D. 397, as late as October or November that year according to one recent estimate.[28] Thus there existed a period of several months, c. July–September, during which the recruitment of the conscripts from the imperial estates may have actually occurred. Indeed the extra manpower afforded him by such a measure may have been one of the factors which tempted Gildo to revolt when he did. Therefore, in so far as it is the recruitment of conscripts from imperial estates which forms the immediate background to the *Passio Typasii*, the temptation is to assign its composition to the latter half of A.D. 397.[29]

One is also forced to ask whether it is the revolt of Gildo, the Moorish *Comes Africae*, which the author really has in mind when he describes the effects of the Quinquegentiani. His description of their devastation of the estates of the Roman population would probably be true, I admit, of any revolt which took its strength from the non-Roman population.[30] However it is worth noting, at least, that the poet Claudian does make such a point also in his description of the revolt of Gildo.[31] There is a degree of exaggeration in the statement of the *Passio Typasii* about the loss of Africa to the empire which seems more suited to a description of Gildo's revolt than the raids of a coalition of native tribes.[32] One wonders also about the description of Roman officials residing safely on islands off Italy.[33] The force which retrieved Africa for the emperor Honorius spent some months, it would seem, on the island of Sicily.[34] Have we here a barbed reference to the delay in retrieving Africa, whether to the delay in general or in particular to the delay by the fleet on Sicily?

There is a third point to be made also in any attempt to date the *Passio Typasii*. Martyr acts played an important part in the liturgical commemoration of the various martyrs on their particular feastdays. In so far as the *Passio Typasii* records the feastday of Typasius as the 11 January it would seem probable that this work was prepared in the period leading up to the 11 January. The exact year one favours in this matter depends on when one dates the sailing of the expeditionary force which retrieved Africa. If, as has been recently claimed, this force did not set sail until February 398, then it would seem better to date the composition of this text to the period before 11 January 399.[35] However if one prefers the more traditional date, that

[28] T. D. Barnes, 'An Anachronism in Claudian', *Historia* 27 (1978), 498–9.

[29] The temptation is all the greater since this date explains why the author used the *Breviarium* of Eutropius as his historical source rather than the *Historia Adversus Paganos* of Orosius which was only composed in A.D. 417. His failure to use the *Chronicle* of Jerome, which was composed at Constantinople c. A.D. 380, is not quite as surprising as would have been his failure to quote from the work of a fellow North African Christian.

[30] *Passio Typasii* 1.3: *Praeterea in Sitifensi provincia gentiles, qui semper pacati fuerant et Quinquegentiani vocantur, direptis provincialium facultatibus atque universis possessoribus incolisque prostratis, latrocinia perpetrabant.*

[31] Claudian, *De Bello Gildonico* 197–200.

[32] *Passio Typasii* 1.5: *Tanta erat desperatio ut Africa Romanis necata videretur imperio.*

[33] *Passio Typasii* 1.4: *Contra quos multi iudices produxerant, et universi cum magnis exercitibus victi perierant, in tantum ut terribili horrore nullus iam comes ad ipsas partes auderet accedere et duces, qui ad Sitifensem provinciam mittebantur, aut aegritudinem fingerent, aut veluti naufragia formidantes, in vicinas Italiae insulas residerent.*

[34] Claudian, *De Bello Gildonico* 516–26.

[35] T. D. Barnes, art. cit., p. 499.

the force sailed in November 397, the period leading up to 11 January 398 would seem an alternative possibility.[36] Whatever one prefers it would seem possible to date this particular text with a degree of accuracy unusual for its genre.

To conclude, the *Passio Typasii* preserves an otherwise unattested title, *praepositus saltus*, which has been interpreted as a military office. However a reexamination of the text suggests that this is more likely to have been a civilian office, that of an official of the *res privata*, a variation in fact of the well attested *procurator saltus*. The *Passio* itself, it has been suggested, is evidence for the recruitment of conscripts on the lands of the *res privata* in Mauretania Caesariensis, which recruitment may actually have occurred in the summer of A.D. 397. In so far as there would seem to be veiled reference also to the revolt by Gildo, the *Comes Africae*, the composition of the *Passio Typasii* may be tentatively assigned to the period c. October 397–January 399, depending on one's understanding of the development of Gildo's revolt and the imperial response to it.

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[36] O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste für die Jahre 311 bis 476 n. Chr.* (1919), p. 292.